



Foreign Agricultural Service

GAIN Report

Global Agriculture Information Network

Scheduled Report - public distribution

Date: 6/3/1999

GAIN Report #NL9034

Netherlands

Livestock

Belgian Ministers Resign due to Dioxin Contaminated Feed Scandal 1999

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Report Highlights:

Continuing reverberations to mismangement in poultry and swine feed sector.

Includes PSD changes: No
Includes Trade Matrix: No
Unscheduled Report
The Hague [NL1], NL

Prior Knowledge Led to Resignation

Less than two weeks before the elections on June 13, the Belgian Minister of Agriculture Karel Pinxten and the Minister of Public Health Marcel Colla, resigned due to the dioxin scandal in Belgium. Belgian political opposition parties called for the resignation of the two Ministers because they were aware of the contamination as long as six weeks ago. The Ministers decided not to inform the Government and the general public due to heavy pressure from the largest and most influential Belgian Farmer's Organization, the "Boerenbond". The "Boerenbond" feared an economic catastrophe for the poultry sector.

Further Penalties in Belgium

The dioxin scandal has now hit the hog sector in Belgium as well. In Flanders, it has been scientifically determined that 500 farms fed contaminated feed to their 200,000 pigs. The newly appointed Minister of Health, Van den Bossche, ruled that no pigs can be slaughtered. No contamination of hog feed has been officially determined, but the Government is taking steps to prevent another scandal. Consumer organizations are furious and the "Boerenbond" will be penalized for the fact that they did not inform the Government and consumer organizations within a reasonable period of time. The owner of the feed company and his son have been detained.

EU Investigation

The affair has led to significant political pressures on Belgium from the EU and neighboring countries. The EU will conduct an investigation into the scandal. The EU member states decided to withdraw all Belgian chickens and related products from the supermarket shelves. Most EU countries are reportedly extremely worried about the situation. In France, 80 poultry farms have supposedly stopped producing broilers. In Greece, all Belgian chickens have reportedly been destroyed.

Dutch Reactions

In The Netherlands, the Deputy Minister of Agriculture, Geke Faber, was heavily criticized because she did not inform Dutch consumers about possible contamination of imported chicken meat from Belgium with dioxin. All Belgian chicken and egg products have been taken off supermarket shelves. The Dutch Deputy Minister admitted that she knew already on April 29 about the dioxin contamination but only undertook measures as of May 12. She added that the contaminated feed was likely not fed to laying hens so that eggs can be normally consumed. Dutch veterinarians are, however, still conducting investigations. She was more concerned about the hog sector since this sector apparently also received contaminated feed. So far there is only one Dutch compound feed producer who admitted that it probably delivered contaminated feed to 500 hog farmers and 55 broiler farms. Farmers are threatening liability suits against the feed producer in question. Meat samples have been taken and no pigs may be slaughtered.